

# National Trails Day: “experience your outdoors”

by Scott Slavik

Alaskans don't need a reason to “go out and play.” In fact, when most Alaskans are out enjoying their favorite pastime, there are probably more reasons to stay inside. If you have ever gone ice fishing in January, dug clams in early spring, or camped in the rain, you know what I'm talking about. There is, however, a great reason to celebrate in the “outdoors” on June 3<sup>rd</sup> regardless of the weather or temperature.

National Trails Day is celebrated at thousands of events nationwide on the first Saturday of every June. Events are hosted by local and statewide trail clubs, city, state, and federal public land and health agencies, community groups and other nonprofit organizations and outdoor-minded business. In 2005, celebrations occurred in all 50 states, as well as, in Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Canada.

National Trails Day was originally recognized and continues to be promoted by the American Hiking Society, a national non-profit organization dedicated to establishing, protecting and maintaining America's foot trails. Now, in its 14<sup>th</sup> year, National Trails Day has grown to inspire nearly a million trail enthusiasts to flock to their favorite trails to celebrate, discover, and learn about trails while attending trail dedications, gear demonstrations, instructional workshops, trail work projects, and educational exhibits.

The goal of National Trails Day is to promote public awareness of and appreciation for trails and the people who build and maintain them. Events are planned and designed to encourage cooperative efforts among various trail users, build partnerships among trail groups, businesses, and public land managers, as well as, promote the health benefits of trails.

To commemorate National Trails Day this year, the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge is giving a guided hike on Lake Emma Trail and a tour of the historical Lake Emma cabin. Lake Emma Trail's remote location and challenging access make it just one gem among many of the refuge's hidden treasures. Lake Emma Trail offers a unique wilderness experience and allows a glimpse of the past as one follows in the footsteps of early hunters and trappers who first explored the area at the turn of the century. The day promises to be a memorable Alaskan adventure with extraordinary

scenery and opportunities for wildlife observation and photography.

Lake Emma Trail was heavily damaged during the Glacier Creek Fire of 2004; however, reconstruction is now mostly complete thanks to a dedicated cadre of refuge staff, youth crews, and volunteers. The re-birth and recovery of this area is well underway as the scorched landscape continues to give-way to fireweed and other pioneer plant species. Unfortunately the Lake Emma guided hike is fully booked, but there are other great opportunities to celebrate National Trails Day both here on the peninsula, as well as, all around the State.

The U.S. Forest Service is hosting a “Kids Fun Day” in Moose Pass which will feature a variety of outdoor activities for the whole family, including a nature hike, craft projects, and healthy snacks. Another opportunity within the Chugach National Forest includes a hike along the north section of the Johnson Pass Trail. The Forest Service has teamed up with the Sierra Club and is looking for volunteers to assist with the installation of a bear-resistant food container. Event planners promise “an informal, fun, family geared event.”

A little farther south, Seward Community Schools is planning an assortment of kids programs, exhibits, workshops, and local music. If you're looking for an opportunity to “get your hands in the dirt” you might consider a road trip to Homer for the weekend. Load up your hand tools and join the Coalition for Homer Open Space and Trails and participate in range of trail maintenance projects around town, as well as across Kachemak Bay.

National Trails Day events are also being planned in Kodiak, Cordova, Thorne Bay, Portage, Barrow, Juneau, and Anchorage. Additional information on these and other National Trail Day events occurring locally, as well as, nationally can be found at [www.AmericanHiking.org](http://www.AmericanHiking.org).

Participating in a National Trails Day event is a great way to show your appreciation for trails and the people who build and maintain them. Without the support of volunteers, land managing agencies, and outdoor-minded businesses our trails would disappear. However, simply enjoying some time “on the

trail” with family, friends, and neighbors is very much in the spirit of the day.

The Kenai Peninsula has a wide variety of trails to choose from regardless of age, interests, skills, or physical abilities. Within a relatively short distance, you can find a trail that accommodates your favorite mode of transportation, whether it is an ATV, snow machine, horse, bicycle, skis, rollerblades or your favorite, well-worn pair of hiking boots.

Trails provide us access to the natural world for exercise, study, photography, camping, relaxing or solitude. Trails are the path to good mental and physical

health by giving us fresh air, getting our hearts pumping, and allowing us the chance to get away from our daily challenges and stresses. The staff at Kenai National Wildlife Refuge encourages everyone to get outside, get active, and experience the wonders of trails in our own “backyard.”

*Scott Slavik is a Backcountry Ranger and spends the summer patrolling and maintaining the trails on the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.*